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## ADULT PAIR OF MERLINS IN SOUTHERN UTAH IN JUNE

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While participating in a Utah Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) survey, the author and a co-observer sighted and confirmed the presence of an adult pair of Merlins (*Falco columbarius*) in southern Utah. The falcons were light in color and were thought to be *F. c. richardsonii*. Positive identification of the subspecies by a tail-band count was not possible.

Observations occurred on 1 June 1984, between 0955 and 1008 H (MDT), south of Bryce Canyon National Park (approx. 112°20'W longitude, 37°27'N latitude). Observations were made using a spotting scope (15 × 30). The female Merlin was sighted at 0955 H perched in a snag at the top of a 120 m, southeast-facing cliff, approximately 0.5 km from the observation site. At 0958 H she

made a shallow stoop to the northeast, parallel to the cliff face, and was lost from view behind a large outcropping on the cliff. Upon her disappearance, an adult male Merlin was sighted in the immediate area perched on a small rock spire of the outcropping. He remained until 1008 H and was subsequently lost from view. Neither falcon was seen again during the remaining two hr of observations. Further investigations were not possible due to the continuing Peregrine survey, and we were unable to document the Merlins' breeding status. The area of the sightings was approximately 2650 m above sea level, dropping 425 m in one km to the valley below. Flora above the cliff consisted chiefly of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), white fir (*Abies concolor*), and Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). Habitat below the cliff varied from Pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*) and Utah Juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*) to grasslands as the elevation decreased (Elias 1980).

Two additional Merlin sightings were made in Canyonlands National Park on 17 and 18 June from two observation points approximately two km apart. Both Merlins sighted were adult males and were thought to be the same bird. Observations were made from the rim of the Colorado River Canyon on both occasions. Flora above the canyon was sparse; however, the canyon floor and many small side canyons in the area maintained populations of pine (*Pinus* sp.). The Merlin's breeding range extends from the taiga through the prairie-parkland biomes (Temple 1972). During the 19th century, it was found as a breeding bird in the Wasatch Mountains of northern Utah (Hayward et al. 1976), although no subsequent breeding records have been reported for this region (Oliphant 1985). Bailey and Niedrach (1965) considered this species a rare winter migrant of Utah, while Hayward et al. (1976) classified it as a sparse breeding resident. The nearest recent breeding by Merlins has been found in southern Idaho, southern Wyoming, northern Colorado and Nebraska (Lock and Craig 1975; Craig and Renn 1977; Lock 1979; Oliphant 1985; Becker pers. comm.).

Occurrence of this species outside of its documented breeding range during the summer months suggests it is not only a winter migrant within Utah as previously indicated. My observation dates fall within incubation and hatching periods of *F. c. richardsonii* in southeastern Montana (Becker and Sieg 1985) and correspond temporally with reports of Merlin breeding chronologies in south-

central Idaho (Craig and Renn 1977). Becker and Sieg (1985) reported that spring arrivals of Merlins at their study area in southeastern Montana occurred between 11 March and 23 April. Based upon this evidence, Merlins observed during my survey were not thought to be migrant birds returning north and may represent a breeding component in Utah.

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